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DE RUEHAN #1435 3560909  
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FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4084  
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0774

UNCLAS ANTANANARIVO 001435

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
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DEPT FOR AF/FO, AF/E  
PARIS FOR D'ELIA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SAMBI WANTS INTERNATIONAL HELP TO END SECURITY "CRISIS"

REF: ANTANANARIVO 1410

¶1. (U) Comoran President Sambu met the diplomatic corps in Moroni to request international assistance to end the stand-off between the Union and Island Governments over division of security responsibilities (reftel). Media reports indicate Union officials want Island forces to be armed with police and riot gear (shields, batons, handcuffs), rather than military weaponry. This long-pending issue is coming to a head before the expected March/April Island President elections, when all parties would like to assure security is maintained.

¶2. (U) The background lies in the peace agreement and new constitution which were brokered to end the crisis after Anjouan seceded in 1999. In addition to the rotating Union Presidency, now held by Anjouan-born Sambu, compromises were reached to postpone decisions on Comoran federalism. The Union National Assembly passed legislation in 2005 to implement separation of security responsibilities, but former President Azali never signed it into law.

¶3. (SBU) Abdallah Massoundi, First Counselor at the Comoran Embassy in Antananarivo, told the RSO December 21 that all was quiet in the Comoros for now, but significant problems remained unresolved. Massoundi said President Sambu is intent on sending Union troops to the Islands to monitor the upcoming elections, but the Island Presidents -- especially Bacar in Anjouan -- demand an international force. President Bacar argues that mixing Union and Island forces would "create further problems" according to Massoundi.

¶4. (SBU) Tracts and talk circulating on Anjouan and Grand Comore again focus on "secession;" the trump card of Comoran politics. Some Anjouanese separatist politicians view Sambu's move last weekend as a threat. A student group in Grand Comore agreed, and called on the Union and Grand Comore governments to avoid actions that threaten the Union.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: While Comoros faces no traditional external threat, the Union Army plays a symbolic role and in theory prevents secession. Anjouan Island President Bacar's refusal to allow Union troops to enter highlights the real danger of inter-island conflict. Post infers that Bacar perceived an erosion of his power and potential interference in his conduct of the election. We have not heard that any international actor is prepared to become involved in this Union/Island dispute, although South Africa and Mauritius - who helped to broker the earlier constitutional compromise - may feel some pressure to help preserve their hard-won, if unstable, accomplishment. END COMMENT.

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